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HOME ACTIVITY CENTERS

Ella M. Cushman

New York State College of Home Economics

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ELLA M. CUSHMAN, ***Professor Emeritus, Economics of the Household and Household Management***

We humans are active all the time—mildly so as in sleeping, reading, or idly resting; moderately so as in washing dishes, playing cards, or sewing; or actively so as in cleaning the basement, playing ball, or riding a bicycle. Each of these activities breaks down into three distinct parts: getting ready, doing, and cleaning up afterwards or putting away.

As you have undoubtedly noticed, it often takes longer and is more tiring to get ready for an activity and to clear up afterwards than to perform the activity. These factors may cause a distaste for performing the activity; we may put it off as long as possible; or we may give up doing it. Lack of organization can cause a sense of frustration, irritation, physical discomfort, or anxiety—feelings which in turn result in fatigue, both mental and physical, a gnawing awareness of possible accidents in connection with the activity, or a fear of failure to achieve. The situation is complicated in a home because two or more persons often attempt to perform different activities at the same time, often in the same limited place, and with inadequate or unsuitable equipment.

These are but a few of the hundreds of major and minor problems that occur in homes every day as families perform their activities. Family members often remain unaware of the factors contributing to these problems until the situation becomes annoying enough to make them want to change it. To illustrate:

The White's were a family of four: Mr. and Mrs. White, Tommy, and Mary. A large family room at the rear of the house took care of many of their individual and family activities. Here was Mr. White's desk where he often worked at night after the children were in bed. Mrs. White had another desk that she used for her club work and as a sewing center. A low table in the center of the room with four chairs was used for games, for looking at books, and other such activities by the children, their friends, and by the family as a whole. At one end of the room were open shelves for toys and books.

As the children became teen-agers they found that their activities changed They wanted to ask their teen-age friends in to dance, and for picnics and parties. They could not do this easily with the old arrangement. So they pooled their ideas. Mr. White moved his desk to the master bedroom where it was quiet. Mrs. White converted a small bedroom on the second floor into a sewing room. The little table in the center of the room was removed. There was more floor space for dancing and the rug could be easily rolled up. As the children grew older and the need for new activities developed, the family cooperated and altered their environment to make these new activities possible.

When Mickey Black came into the house on winter days, he went through the front hall to the kitchen where he took off his coat, cap, and mittens, and dumped them on the floor. Then he sat on the floor to remove his boots. If Mrs. Black was busy getting dinner, Mickey was in the way. She had to stop her work and hang up his garments. The hooks were too high for Mickey to reach. Mrs. Black and Mickey both felt cross and irritated at this performance. Mrs. Black studied the situation and decided it was not Mickey's fault. He had no other place to put his garments. With his help she designed an open coat closet in the front hall. They measured Mickey for height and put up a broomstick to serve as a clothes rod; three compartments, easy for Mickey to reach, took care of his scarves, caps, and mittens; his boots stood on the floor of the cupboard. They designed and made a stool the right height for Mickey where he could sit to put on or take off his boots. Mickey took pride in hanging up his wraps. He took pride, too, in becoming a more helpful member of the family. Mrs. Black was happy to be rid of the congestion in the kitchen, and the success of this project led Mickey and his mother to study some of Mickey's other activities and make centers for them. They enjoyed this new relationship.

A study of conditions under which many families in New York State carry on their activities has led to the idea of **activity centers. An activity center may be defined as a place where an activity can be carried on under conditions most suitable for its satisfactory performance.**

Good management is necessary to develop activity centers. That is, it is important for your family to know why and if activity centers will be of help to you; which are most important; and what they will contribute to the kind of home life your family desires. Your family needs to know the resources available for developing the activity center they want, the material things necessary, their own ideas and experiences, and those of others.

It is a great help to see activity centers in different homes and to study printed material and pictures on the subject. Through these shine the creative ability of the family in relation to its everyday life. While these ideas may not fit your particular situation, they may suggest entirely new possibilities. The hardest part of this management process is to pull all these ideas together, to see them in relation to what is important and possible for your family, and to come to a decision as to the best and most suitable centers for your family in your situation. Finally, and most important, you need initiative and enterprise to put this plan into concrete form. This process of thinking and acting is what we mean by management.

Some families have a greater awareness of their own individual and family values than have others. What is important to one may not be to another. One family's resources, both human and material, may vary greatly from those of another family. The Joneses have money to spend, while the Browns have less money but more original ideas and ability to carry them out. Houses vary in degree of flexibility, making it easier for some than for others to adapt activity centers to current needs as family members grow and activities change.

Some persons are keenly aware of possibilities in the use of their resources, and it is easier for some than it is for others to weigh values and make decisions. We all know that acting upon a decision is often much harder than making that decision. All of these phases of home management apply to the development of successful activity centers in the home. These centers do not just happen. The final test of a successful activity center is whether it brings satisfaction to those using it.

The photographs in this bulletin illustrate activity centers that families in New York State have developed to meet their own needs. Studying these pictures and reading the descriptions is next best to seeing the activity centers; it will help you to develop your sense of discrimination and will give you ideas. Although no one center would be satisfactory to every family, each one shows evidences of good management.

As you look at the pictures, it would be interesting for you to imagine what these families are like. What do they seem to be striving for? What are their probable resources, including abilities? And what might be the many major and minor decisions they have to make? You might also like to pick out the different characteristics of each center and those which are most common to all the homes represented. This may help you to evaluate your own activity centers and to think of new ones.

The purpose of this bulletin is primarily to help you become **more aware of the great number of activities carried on in your home, to help you choose the most important activities for which to make centers, and to realize the possibility of making them.**

Centers for meal preparation, laundering, and sewing have been omitted. Much has been published about these centers in college bulletins and homemaking magazines; and information is available through magazine advertisements, radio, television, exhibits, and other media.

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FAMILY A

Teen-Agers' Recreation Center

The A family is interested in giving their teen-age children every opportunity to entertain their friends at home. Toward this end they made a basement room into a recreation room large enough for six couples to dance and for a larger number to watch moving pictures or slides. These young people serve refreshments from the table in the corner (figure 1). Games are on the shelves at the right. The map of the Philippines hanging at the right shows where the family spent one year. From the Philippines they also acquired the table, stools, and wall decorations. The screen is for use in showing slides and moving pictures. The ceiling light is good but not in the way. More seating space for watching slides is provided by the extra stools and the couch (figure 2). Card tables are stored in the narrow closet at the end of the built-in cupboard. Radio and records are on top of the shelves and books below. The maps mark points of family travels. This room was possible because the whole family pooled their resources of ingenuity in planning and skill in carrying out their plan.

Boy's Hobby Center

As a child, Robert was fascinated with the growing of African violets and other house plants. The window sills were full of them. To help Robert develop this hobby, his parents enclosed an outside porch and built a cupboard under the window (figure 3). On top of this Robert placed his house plants in a tray that he keeps moist. If the sun is too bright, he pulls the curtains. The cupboard contains his watering pot as well as equipment used in connection with other hobbies; stamp and coin collecting, fishing, and the like. The family feel that the money and thought invested in this project were well spent.

Boy's Study Center

Around the corner from the plant stand, Robert, now in junior high school, has his study center. (See cover.) He placed the radio over the bed to waken him in the morning. The map over the bed shows the route of a Boy Scout camping expedition which Robert once took. Robert can easily make room for a rollaway cot for an occasional overnight guest.

FAMILY B

Child's Play Center

The B's live in a third floor apartment in a busy shopping area. Mrs. B has been ill and can go up and down stairs only once a day. It is most important that she keep well. Four-year-old Harry has become a problem. He is not allowed to play on the street alone so most of his energy has to be worked off in the apartment. Harry had been marking up the walls of the living room and of the long hall. To prevent this, Mrs. B fastened a large piece of beaver board to a wall in Harry's room (figure 4), and attached some spring clothespins to it. She collected some advertisement pages from a newspaper on which to paint and showed Harry how to fasten these to the wallboard with the clothespins. Mrs. B. got Harry some

poster paints and made a box with a handle in which to keep them. He carries it to the sink for water. He hangs his plastic apron on a hook at the corner of the board. Mrs. B has no more trouble with marked up walls, and Harry now likes to do things for himself.

The B's obtained a discarded school desk and seat where Harry can sit comfortably and look at his picture books. The window at the left throws good light on the desk. Harry keeps his tricycle in the corner. He likes to ride up and down the long hall for exercise. His amusements are no longer an irritation and burden to his mother.

Toy Storage Center

Harry kept his playthings in a large carton too deep for him to reach the bottom. When friends came to play he would dump the carton of toys on the living room floor so the children could find those they wanted. When Harry's friends had finished playing they were tired, and picking up all the toys seemed like a burden. The aftermath was usually unhappy for both Harry and his mother. A home economics student in the community offered to help with this problem. She first measured all the toys and then built some open shelves for them. Here each toy could be seen and removed easily without interfering with the others. Harry took a keen interest in the building process (figure 5). When the cupboard was finished he was wild with delight and insisted on putting all the toys away himself. He became interested in watching the student's carpentry work and wanted to learn how to drive nails. Consequently, the student would drive a nail part way into the wood, show Harry how to hold the hammer, and then let him finish driving it himself. He developed a good deal of skill for a little boy.

Between the toy cupboard and the wall, the student installed a piece of broomstick, low enough so that Harry is able to hang his wraps on it. The floor (shown also in figure 4) is bare, which simplifies the cleaning.

FAMILY C

Combination Centers

The C's, a family of two retired adults, found it necessary to perform their work and recreational activities with the least amount of energy. They wished to make use of every possibility for enjoying life. In the kitchen, they installed long windows in front of which they placed a table, rather than having short windows with a sink below. Figure 6 shows how they arranged a center here where they can perform several activities. At the table they eat breakfast and lunch. The coffeemaker, toaster, waffle iron, fruit dish, condiments, and paper napkins are all within reach. The cookie jar sits under the shelf behind the curtain at the right. After breakfast, to save time they plan dinner and lunch for the day and make their market order. They keep a notebook for menus and pencil and paper in the box at the right. Cookbooks are on the shelf at the left of the door while other recipe files are under the curtain at the left. A book on nutrition to aid in meal planning is at the left on the window shelf. Here also is a notebook where the family lists cash expenditures.

The most satisfying activity of this center is studying nature. Many varieties of birds flock to the feeder outside of the window and to the feeding tray in front of the left window where birdseed and suet are available. A bird book for frequent reference is on the left end of the window shelf. At the edge of the meadow, a few feet from the lawn, are naturalized daffodils; around the shrubbery, scillas, violets, and crocuses bloom; in the meadow are flowering trees and shrubs against a background of evergreens. This indeed is a satisfying combination center and helps this couple get off to a good start every day.

This same couple added a room, 8 by 12 feet, to their house for sleeping and resting, for serving lunch or dinner, coffee or tea, and for raising house plants.

A 39-inch bed with a comfortable mattress and pillows, and warm lightweight bedding for one of the C's pulls out on swivel casters from under the cupboards above (figure 7). The right hand storage space (figure 8) contains an extra blanket, sheets, pillowcases. A small fire extinguisher, an extra pillow, a flashlight, and other articles sometimes used at night are stored at the left.

Figure 9 shows a pleasant place to serve coffee or tea to a small group. An electric outlet is behind the chair. By setting up two card tables (figure 10) informal luncheons or dinners are sometimes served. The meal is put on a service wagon and wheeled in from the kitchen.

A veritable flower garden in the house is shown in figure 11. Leak proof galvanized liners fit the plant trays which are finished with asphalt paint. Pea gravel covers the bottoms. This is kept moist all the time.

FAMILY D

Breakfast and Lunch Center

The D's who had been recently married thought it would be practical and less costly in the long run to buy a lot outside of the city (where Mr. D teaches) and to build their own house. They bought a pre-cut house which Mr. D helped to erect. He did all the cabinet work himself over a period of years. The D's house has no dining room but they plan to add one as their family increases. Until such time, they eat dinner at the end of the living room next to the kitchen, and breakfast and lunch at a drop-leaf table in the kitchen (figure 12). A plug for the toaster is in the back of the cupboard wall. They keep dry ingredients for breakfast and a toaster in the cupboard. This saves Mrs. D many steps. Silver is in one of the drawers and account books and records are on the top shelf. Table dishes are in the cupboard at the left of the table and on the wall is the telephone and a bulletin board for important notices. The kitchen is well lighted by fluorescent lights above and by two windows opposite the table. Mrs. D plans her meals and makes up her market order without moving from this center.

FAMILY E

Breakfast and Lunch Center

Mrs. E is a young mother with four small children. She has tried to simplify breakfast and lunch preparation and at the same time to make these meals pleasant and sociable.

The E's kitchen is long and narrow. Maps on the wall are often the source of conversation. Aside from its social aspects, this center saves Mrs. E time and effort. She sits at the lower left (figure 13) by the range where she can oversee the cooking and the children. The children push their stools under the counter when through. At the far end of the counter, Mrs. E keeps her cookbooks, account books, and other items used in the daily planning that is so important to a satisfactory home life. The linoleum covered counter is attractive and easy to clean. Table supplies and a radio occupy the shelves above the counter. The plastic dishes are unbreakable. Daylight comes from the door and window opposite.

FAMILY F

Children's Play Centers

The F's have two little girls, one of pre-school and one of school age, whose interests differ. Their playroom opens off from the kitchen. The oldest girl and her friends like to play school; so with her mother's help, she equipped one corner of the room as a school room (figure 14). Mrs. F made the desk. Here sits the teacher while the pupils sit at the round table. One of the children's paintings hangs on the wall.

The pre-school child plays with dolls. She and her little friends fixed up the corner next to the school room for a doll house (figure 15). The doll beds are homemade. Mrs. F reports no interference between the two age groups of children. This arrangement gives Mrs. F a good opportunity to watch the children play as she irons in this room.

FAMILY G

Child's Table Setting Center

The G's consider it important to have their children take part in household activities. They planned convenient centers for this purpose, and the children enjoy and feel pride in their tasks. Tommy's job is to set the table (figure 16). He can reach the dishes and silver from the low cupboard between kitchen and dining center. Eventually the dishes will be kept in higher cupboards in the kitchen and wheeled to the dining center on a cart.

Children's Lunch Packing Center

Mrs. G saves time and effort by having the children put up their own lunches at the lunch preparation center in the kitchen, and the children have the satisfaction of fixing their lunches to suit themselves (figure 17). The bread box and lunch boxes are kept on the shelf between refrigerator and oven, while the waxed paper and sandwich spreads are on the lowest shelf in the cupboard above.

FAMILY H

Family Picnic Center

The H's have a home on the edge of a large lake within driving distance of the city where Mr. H works. They have a dock, a boat, a picnic center with a long table large enough for the family and for guests, plenty of comfortable chairs, a fireplace, and a metal cupboard for dishes (figure 18).

In summertime, three generations enjoy life together at the H's lakeside home. Here they swim, fish, row, and feed the ducks. When weather permits, they eat their meals at the picnic center. By good planning, the H's can bring all the food from the house in one trip. They wash dishes in boiled lake water. Figure 19 shows a closeup of the fireplace which Mrs. H's father, a stone mason, made from bricks and parts of an old coal stove. The stove surface is adequate, and the chimney carries away the smoke. The lid can be removed from the middle section for broiling. Mrs. H's father also made the metal cupboard (figure 20; shown too in figure 18). It is tightly constructed on a brick foundation. The door fits tight so that little dust can filter in. It contains only necessary dishes and supplies, which stay there all summer.

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FAMILY I

Family Rest Center

A large kitchen has its advantages. In one corner of the I's kitchen, beside the back door, the family made a rest center (figure 21). A family member coming home from school or work can stop there and read the paper, turn on the radio, skim through a magazine, or just relax or visit while meal preparation goes on. Mrs. I keeps her bulletins, clippings, and such items in the files which she covered with decorative paper. She too can use this center to rest or read.

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FAMILY J

Office Center

A building contractor and his wife decided it would be convenient and would cost less in the long run to have his office at home. He built a room on the first floor with an outside entrance for this purpose. During the day the family uses this room for reading or telephoning. Mrs. J makes out the monthly bills at the counter. Mr. J planned his office to make his work efficient. A counter with shelves and cupboards above, drawers beneath, and a storage cupboard at the right (figure 22) comprise Mr. J's work center. It is a good height for him as his posture indicates. For eye comfort concealed lighting extends the length of the counter. The wall back of the counter is of wallboard where Mr. J. thumbtacks memorandums as an aid to his memory. The typewriter and adding machine simplify his work. The shelves in the closet (shown in figure 23) are closely spaced to take care of rolls of blueprints and flat objects. Mr. J plans to raise the safe by building a cupboard beneath it.

Children's Play Center

The J's planned a recreation center in the basement of their new house (figure 24), but decided not to finish it until their five children were older. At the present, the room serves as a playroom. The children keep their toys in this room in temporary open cupboards. They can sit at the table to look at picture books and play games. The large floor covered with rubber tile gives ample space to ride tricycles and here they can play ball without danger of damaging anything. This room in the basement gives the children ample opportunity to work off their excess energy on bad days without damaging the rest of the house and without disturbing Mr. J when he is working in his office.

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FAMILY K

Adult's Writing Center

Mr. and Mrs. K's two sons had married and left home so the K's built a house outside the city better suited to their needs. Mr. K is a college professor and likes to bring home some of his work to do in the evening. They planned their house with a long living room extending the full length of the house. Mr. K uses one end of this room for a writing center (figure 25). It is well lighted, both naturally and artificially. The tavern table forms a large surface on which Mr. K spreads out his materials; it is consistent with the other early American furnishings in the room. The shelf below the table and the long bench at the end offer convenient space for classifying and temporarily storing material. Mr. K uses the typewriter frequently and finds it convenient on his work table. Mr. and Mrs. K like this informal work center and feel that it adds to the individuality of the living room. Moreover, it was created from their own resources: an ability to plan well, the good use of furniture already on hand, and skill on the part of Mr. K in building the shelves.

Boy's Hobby Center

The K's lived in a different house when their son, Peter, was in college. Mr. K turned over the coal cellar to Peter to make into a hobby den (figure 26). Peter, with a fellow student, cleaned out the debris, whitewashed the walls, and built the counter. Then the room was wired for good visibility throughout. They bought the necessary tools for making airplanes, a special hobby which was important to both boys. They built in a radio with a loud speaker at the right and put up a projector screen. Planning and executing this hobby center was as much fun as the hobbies they carried on there.

FAMILIES L AND M

Adult's Study Center

Miss L. who shares her home with Mrs. M is a college teacher and research worker. Because she finds it is very important to do some of her work at home, she has equipped a spare room as a study (figure 27). Notice the circular work surface where she can spread out her papers and reach them easily without standing and stepping. It is easy to be efficient in this convenient work center, and she accomplishes the maximum of work with the greatest satisfaction. Notice the good lighting.

Adult's Hobby Center

Mrs. M, a trained nurse, has developed interesting hobbies since her retirement. She equipped a large room in the basement for wood working, wood carving, and making copper jewelry. She has paid strict attention to the selection of good tools. The heights of her work surfaces were consciously planned for her comfort, and she built some of them herself. Besides these hobbies, Mrs. M takes care of a large flower garden in the summer. Retirement is no horror to her for her hobbies add to her pleasure as well as her income.

Figure 28 shows Mrs. M making copper jewelry. Notice the kiln sitting on a thick piece of asbestos for safety. Good lighting comes from above. The height of the counter is comfortable for Mrs. M either standing or sitting.

Mrs. M does wood carving at the center shown in figure 29. She stands to use the vise but sits to do the more detailed hand work. Her tools are within reach on the wall, and objects she has carved are on the bench.

FAMILY N

Baby Care Center

The N's have two pre-school children and a new baby. Mrs. N does all her own work and wants to spare herself as much as possible. She finds it convenient to do much of her work in her large light kitchen. She bathes the baby in the sink and dries her on the counter in front of the window (figure 30). She says the sink and counter are just the right height. She keeps the towels and baby clothes on open shelves at the left and the soap, oils, powders, and other supplies on the corner of the counter. After the bath, Mrs. N puts the baby in her high chair were she sits contentedly while her mother goes about her kitchen work. The other children have a play center in another corner of this family activity room. This large kitchen divided into different centers makes it possible for Mrs. N to keep in touch with the children as she works.

FAMILY O

Child's Dressing Center

Three-year old Elsie has her own room in her parents' small house. To help make Elsie independent in dressing herself, Mr. O put up a clothes rod within Elsie's easy reach in the open space that serves as a closet (figure 31). Mrs. O made a shoe bag which she hung on the wall under the clothes rod. The day the closet was finished Elsie changed her dress three times without adult help. She felt grown up and responsible.

FAMILY P

Child's Play Center

Two year old Mary likes to play where her mother is, but she is in danger of being hurt if she plays in the kitchen when her mother works there. Mrs. P removed the bottom drawer from an old dresser and placed the dresser in the corner of the kitchen away from the work centers (figure 32). On the lower shelf she placed some unused kitchen utensils with which the child plays while her mother is in the kitchen. It is easy for Mary to put away her playthings. Mrs. P made the drawer into a playhouse which the child uses in the dining room when her mother is working there. She also has a play center in the living room and in her bedroom. The rooms in this house are on three levels. Mrs. P thinks that more than one play center in the home is a safety measure; it also simplifies life and makes it more satisfying.

FAMILY Q

Child's Play Center

Even a small plot of ground between apartment houses can function as an outdoor play center for a child (figure 33)—so thought the Q's. They cleaned up brush and rubbish and planted flowers behind the wire fence. Little Ann gets her fresh air and sunshine in this tiny play center where she plays with her dolls. Her mother enjoys it too.

FAMILY R

Children's Sleeping Center

To build a home of their own was of major importance to the R family. They wished to save money for this home by continuing to live in a small apartment with their three young children. At first, the R's could sleep in two small bedrooms, but later Mr. R partitioned the children's bedroom to make two very small rooms—one for the boy and one for the girls. Since only one narrow bed could be placed in these rooms, Mr. R built a double-deck bed for the girls (figure 34). Each girl can reach an artificial light from her bed. The beds are comfortable and the comforter at the end can be pulled up when needed without calling for help. The ladder is sturdy and the steps are close enough together so the children can climb without danger. The window just beyond the dressing table gives good air and daylight.

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GUIDES TO SUCCESSFUL ACTIVITY CENTERS

The following are questions you will want to ask yourself when you plan an activity center. Remember that they are guides, not rules. While all the ideas are good, it would be a rare family that could incorporate them all in any one center, just as it would be impossible to have a center for every activity carried on in the home. Life is too complex. One has to think, to weigh values, and to choose. Actually, in no one center shown in this bulletin can all the questions be answered by "yes."

1. Is the center located in an appropriate place?
2. Are the things used at the center suitable for the activity as determined by those using it?
3. Are the things used at the center located where used? Are they easy to see, to reach, to grasp?
4. Are storage spaces convenient for storage of things used in the activity? Are there files, step shelves, racks, tray dividers, and other conveniences?
5. Is it possible to clean up and put away at the center?
6. If things used at the center cannot be stored where used, are there easy means of transportation by cart, tray, basket, bag, or otherwise?
7. Can adjustments be made to carry on more than one activity at a center by more than one person?
8. Is the over-all area suitable in size for those participating?
9. Is the surface suitable in size for the activities carried on there?
10. Are the surfaces used of a comfortable height for the person using them most frequently? Are they adjustable in height?
11. Is it possible to carry on an activity both sitting and standing at the center?
12. Are the seats comfortable, of a height and depth to fit the occupant, and in good relation to the surface where used?
13. Are seats adjustable in height, or can they be made so by cushions, boards, footstools, or by other means?
14. Is the surface adjustable in height, or can it be made so?
15. Is there good light, both outdoor and artificial, at the center?
16. Is the activity center free from accident hazards? Are there means of coping with accidents?
17. Can your activity centers be more successful by making compromises and by cooperating with others using them?

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